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THE SPIRITUAL RENEWAL OF RUSSIA AND THE END OF THE WORLD

And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for the space of half an hour. (Revelation 8,1)

The Russian Revolution was prophesied by many holy people long before it actually took place. The Orthodox Archbishop Andrey spoke of this in his report at the Pastoral Conference at Jordanville in 1969. Here he stated that everything that had happened in Russia, from the Revolution on, was predictable from as far back as 1470. For it was then that the Judaizing heresy began in Novgorod. This heresy was not in fact about Judaism itself, but essentially about keeping the form of Orthodoxy beneath the mask of Western humanism (The Orthodox Way, 1987, p.39). However, it is less well-known that holy people both in and outside Russia, also prophesied the fall of atheism and the rebirth of Orthodoxy in Russia 'for the space of half an hour', before the end.

Perhaps the best known such prophecy about the future of Russia, made in 1831, almost 100 years before the Revolution, is that of St Seraphim of Sarov to Motovilov: 'Many times I heard from the mouth of the great Elder, pleasing to God, Father Seraphim, that he would not lie in Sarov in the flesh. And behold, once I dared to ask him: 'Father, all the time you deign to say that you will not lie in Sarov in the flesh. Does this mean that the monks of Sarov will give you away?' 'Your godliness, the Lord God has ordained that I, the humble Seraphim, should live considerably longer than a hundred years. But since, towards that time, the bishops will become so impious that in their impiety they will surpass the Greek bishops of the time of Theodosius the Younger, so that they will no longer even believe in the main dogma of the Christian faith: therefore it has pleased the Lord God to take me, the humble Seraphim, from this fleeting life until that time, and then resurrect me, and my resurrection will be like the resurrection of the Seven Youths in the cave of Ochlon in the days of Theodosius the Younger'.

'Having revealed to me this great and fearful mystery, the great Elder informed me that after his resurrection, he would go from Sarov to Diveyevo and there would begin the preaching of worldwide repentance. For this preaching, and above all because of the miracle of resurrection, a great multitude of people will gather from all the ends of the earth; Diveyevo would become a Laura...And preaching repentance in Diveyevo, Fr Seraphim would uncover four relics there, and after uncovering them he would himself lie down in their midst. And then soon, the end of everything would come' (The Orthodox Word, 1973, No. 50, pp.123-4).

In 1825 Elder Heliodorus of the Glinsk Hermitage had a terrible vision of the future Revolution (Glinsk Patericon, St Xenia Skete, 1984, pp. 142-5). However, in 1868 Elder Porphyry of the same Hermitage not only had a vision of the catastrophes coming to Russia, 'reason will be blinded by the glory of earthly (Western) glory', but also of what

would follow. Praying to know what would happen after the disasters, the angel of the vision said to him: 'The Lord will raise up from the people those unknown to the world and they will restore that which has been downtrodden' (The Orthodox Way, 1990, p.155).

Later, in 1905, St John of Kronstadt prophesied: 'Russia, if you fall away from your faith, as many of the intellectual class have already fallen away, you will no longer be Russia or Holy Russia. And if there is no repentance in the Russian people, then the end of the world will draw near (Fr. John of Kronstadt, Utica, N.Y., 1958, p.164). As regards other holy men in Russia at the beginning of the Revolution, they too knew that there would be a great trial for Russia, but also foretold an end to this trial. Thus, before the Revolution, Elder Barnabas of the Gethsemane Skete spoke of the coming disaster: 'Persecutions against the faith will constantly increase. There will be unheard of sorrow and darkness, and almost all the churches will be closed. But when it seems to people that endurance is no longer possible, then deliverance will come. There will be a flowering. Churches will even begin to be built. But this will be a flowering before the end.' (The Orthodox Word, 1981, No. 100, p. 211).

Elder Alexis of the Zosima Hermitage said: 'The Russian people must be purified of sin through great trials. We must pray and fervently repent'. (Orthodox Russia, 1970, No. 1, p. 9). In February 1917 St Anatolius the Younger of Optina made this prophecy: 'There will be a storm. And the Russian ship will be smashed to pieces. But people can be saved even on splinters and fragments. And not all will perish. We must pray, everybody must repent and pray with fervour. And what happens after a storm?...There will be a calm...A great miracle of God will be revealed. And by the will of God and His power, all the splinters and fragments will come together and be united, and the ship will be rebuilt in its beauty and will go on its own way, as foreordained by God. And this will be a miracle clear to all...(Orthodox Russia, 1970, No. 1, p. 9). Also in 1917, St Nectarius of Optina said: 'Russia will arise, she will not be materially rich, but she will be spiritually rich and in Optina there will be another seven luminaries, another seven pillars'. (I. M. Kontzevich, Optina Monastery and its Age, Jordanville, 1973, p. 538).

Not long before his repose in August 1918, Elder Aristocleus (1838-1918), foretold: 'Now we are going through the time before Antichrist, but Russia will still be delivered. There will be many sufferings, many torments. The whole of Russia will become a prison, and we must greatly beseech the Lord for forgiveness. We must repent of our sins and fear to commit even the slightest sin, but strive to do good, even the smallest. For even a fly's wing has weight, and God's scales are precise. And when even the smallest good in the cup overflows, then God will reveal His mercy to Russia. Ten days before the end of his life the Elder said that the end would come 'through China'. He said that there would be an extraordinary outburst and a miracle of God would be revealed. And there would be an utterly different life, but non of this would be for long (Orthodox Russia, 1969, No. 21, p. 3).

He also said: 'Russia's rebirth will begin after a most powerful explosion on the banks of a great river'. Many have seen in this the explosion in 1986 at Chernobyl, which in Ukrainian means 'Wormwood' (Revelation 8,11) (Bishop Alexander of South America, Easter Message 2005). In the 1920s the Elder Theodore of the Monastery of the Ascension in Irkutsk spoke of the future, after his Monastery had been razed by the atheists. Then aged eighty, he foretold to future Russian refugees to China and Australia, who asked him how long the atheist persecution would last, that first: 'This fire must go around the whole world' (Archbishop Savva of Australia, Easter Message 1967).

In the darkest days of persecution, when everything seemed hopeless, Elder Seraphim (Vyritsky) (1865-1949) spoke of impending rebirth, of the opening of churches and

monasteries, and that the gates of hell would not overcome. Specifically, he spoke of the rebirth of the Trinity St Sergius Laura, Diveyevo, the Laura of St Alexander of the Neva and others, and that Leningrad would once more be called St Petersburg. He also spoke of a time when Russia would flourish again spiritually, when even heterodox would sail to Russia to be baptised. But this period would not last for long, for fifteen years, and then Antichrist would come. He also warned that the end would come not through persecution, but through the temptations of money and the attractions of this world (Bishop Alexander of South America, Easter Message 2005).

In the 1930s, Archbishop Theophan of Poltava, whose destiny it was to live in exile as a hermit in a cave in western France and be buried in a village graveyard, summed up the prophecies which he had received from such Elders: 'You ask me about the near future and about the last times. I do not speak on my own, but give the revelation of the Elders: The coming of Antichrist draws nigh and is very near. The time separating us from him should be reckoned as a matter of years and at most a few decades. But before the coming of Antichrist Russia must yet be restored - true, for a short time. And in Russia there must be a King, forechosen by the Lord Himself. He will be a man of burning faith, have a mind of genius and iron will. This much has been revealed about him. We shall await the fulfilment of what has been revealed. Judging by many signs this is drawing nigh, unless, because of our sins, the Lord God revokes and changes what has been promised.' (The Orthodox Way, 1973, p. 124).

Again in the 1930s in Belgrade, a pious Russian layman, Vasily Pavlovich Yakovlev, wrote: 'If Russia is to saved and resurrected, it will only be because the blood of the New Martyrs, who suffered for the Orthodox Faith and the Holy Church, will cry out to heaven and their redeeming sacrifice will be accepted by the All-Gracious and All-Merciful Lord (The Orthodox Way, 1953, p.170).

In his report to the Diaspora Council in Yugoslavia in 1938, St John of Shanghai and Western Europe wrote: 'The catastrophe which has come to Russia is the direct result of terrible sins, and the rebirth of Russia is possible only after being cleansed from them...In chastising, the Lord is at the same time also showing Russian people the path of salvation, making it into a preacher of Orthodoxy all over the world. The Russian diaspora has made all the ends of the world familiar with Orthodoxy; the mass of Russian exiles are mostly unconsciously preachers of Orthodoxy...It has been given to Russians outside Russia to shine the light of Orthodoxy all over the world, so that other peoples, seeing their good deeds, might glorify our Father Who is in heaven, and thus obtain salvation for themselves. The diaspora will have to be converted to the path of repentance and, obtaining forgiveness for itself through prayer to God and spiritual rebirth, will also be enabled to regenerate our suffering homeland' (The Orthodox Word, 1973, No. 50, pp. 92, 94).

St John ended his report with a prophecy and the hope that there would be a true Feast of the Resurrection in Russia, that would shine forth to the whole world before the end and the beginning of the universal Kingdom of God: 'Shake off the slumber of despondency and sloth, O sons of Russia! Behold the glory of her sufferings and cleanse yourselves; wash away your sins! Be strengthened in the Orthodox faith, to be worthy to dwell in the house of the Lord and to settle on His holy mountain! Leap up, leap up, rise up! O Russia, you who from the Lord's hands have drunk of the cup of His wrath! When your sufferings are over, your righteousness shall go with you and the glory of the Lord shall accompany you. The peoples shall come to your light, and kings to the radiance which shall rise on you. Then lift up your eyes and see: behold, your children come to you from the West and the North and the Sea and the East, blessing Christ in you for ever. Amen' (ibid., p. 94).

St Laurence of Chernigov (1868-1950) said: 'In Russia the faith will blossom and there will be rejoicing as before – but only for a short time, for the Dread Judge will come to judge the quick and the dead' (Schema-Archimandrite Laurence and his Time, Chernigov 2001).

In the 1970s the pious Evdokia of Diveyevo foretold to a priest: 'Soon, soon, here in Diveyevo, there will be a celebration. Now it is not years, not months, but days and hours that remain until the opening of the monastery and the manifestation of four relics: those of the Saint, the Foundress (of Diveyevo) Alexandra, Matushka Martha, and Blessed Evdokeyushka, who was tortured and killed by the atheists....The Saint (Seraphim) commands me: Tell him and no one else... that soon, soon, both the monastery and the relics will be opened...He orders me to tell you that without fail you must come here for the opening of the church and the relics' (Nadezhda, 1977, No.1, p. 148). Others at this time, East and West, were granted the intuition and steadfast faith that the triumph of the New Martyrs and Confessors would soon be revealed.

Finally, in 1981, Hieromonk Seraphim (Rose) wrote: '...Russia, cleansed by the blood of its martyrs, indeed has a better chance than any other country to awake from the sleep of atheism and unbelief...as others have said, it cannot be that the blood of Russia's innumerable martyrs will be in vain; undoubtedly it is the seed of the last great flowering of true Christianity' (The Orthodox Word, 1981, No 100, p.216).

Since all these words, the last of them spoken nearly twenty-five years ago, many of the events foretold have taken place in Russia, notably those at Diveyevo. This is a key event, because, according to the revelation to St Seraphim, Diveyevo is the fourth and final apanage of the Mother of God on earth, after Athos, Georgia and the Kiev Caves Laura.

Nevertheless, the renewal in Russia is still very limited. Only a very small minority of the inhabitants of the Russian Federation practise their faith. In many a provincial town, churches still lie in ruins and statues of Lenin still stand in pride. And in the centre of Moscow itself, the corpse of this twentieth-century executioner is still chemically preserved. As a result, we learn, with shock, but not surprise, that official figures count four to six million abortions per year. Alcoholism and drug-taking are widespread. The sad attempts of the 'avant-garde' to imitate contemporary, degenerate Western cultural fads lead them to lose their true natures. As regards the activities of the Russian Mafia, they are too well-known to mention here.

On the other hand, compared to the drying up of the faith and general spiritual decadence in Western Europe, it is also true that even this small revival in Russia, starting at the grassroots, looks like a spiritual rebirth. It is clear that, despite the re-opening of many churches and monasteries, especially the Monastery of Diveyevo, and the canonization of many New Martyrs and Confessors, most of the above prophecies are still to be realized. Cupolas have been regilded, a small percentage of the population has returned to the practice of authentic Orthodoxy, but there is still far to go. Nevertheless, we take heart from the prophecies of the saints, but are aware that they will only be realized in full, if repentance spreads much further and deeper, beginning among ourselves. Just as the relics of St Nicholas of Bari were brought from the East to renew the spiritually paralysed West over nine hundred years ago, we pray that the light of Orthodoxy may come again to us all, to renew us and give us spiritual rebirth.

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